A dead Indian, a new magazine

If nothing else, "Osceola," the quizzical piece of newsprint you hold before you, is an impossible reality.

Impossible because it hopes to serve as voice of the people in Richland County and in South Carolina at a time when most people are speechless . . . spellbound and awe-struck by the enormity of the problems facing American society, be it strife in the schools, crime in the streets, hunger in the ghettoes, or corruption in the local, state and national governments.

Osceola wants to bring a little piece of populism back into your life looking into and sometimes striking out at the forces which control the average citizen, oftentimes without his knowledge or consent. Forces like government, of course, but other, less noticeable forces as well . . . things like unfair business practices which bleed the pocketbooks of wage-earners, services which are not distributed to everyone equally, "statesmen" who serve their own interests or the interests of the powerful instead of serving all taxpayers and citizens.

That's the impossible part. The reality is what you hold in your hands.

We dedicate the first issue of this reality to people who believe that no matter how bad things are, a little truth can light the way. We offer "Osceola" not as a substitute for the daily press, but as a companion volume, attempting to deal with issues in a more realistic fashion than the commercial press seems capable of . . . or inclined to do.

We find the commercial press a strange beast indeed, for what we read in the pages of the local daily seems somehow foreign to what we see and know is going on in the real world. The commercial press often seems like a t.v. soap opera; oblivious to any reality the average citizen knows or understands, developing its own story line filled with people whose names we know, but whose personalities and actions are often in sharp contrast to what we know to be true of them. The crooked politician often appears as a combination statesman/ saint because, you see, the commercial press is always fair,, even when they're hypocritical and dishonest.

But then, the commercial press has a lot of obligations . . . obligations to advertisers, who may or may not be honest;obligations to stockholders, who may or may not be crooked; obligations to a wide assortment of powerful, influential people whose favor must be curried under the misguided piece of logic which goes: "Sink or swim, we're all in the same boat."

"Osceola" can and will be different. For while we're not a bunch of flaming idealists, we aren't driven by the profit-and-or-power motive either. Our responsibilities are to the average citizens of this county and state who deserve to know what truth we can find to tell them.

The publishers of "Osceola" want to offer a service heretofore unavailable in this state . . . a forum for the honest discussion of events which affect lives . . . a place for people to speak up who want to speak up but who, in the past, have had no place to do so.

We frankly invite anyone who has information concerning actions which are working to the advantage of a few and to the disadvantage of the many to write to us, come to us, talk with us, help us bring such actions to the attention of our readers in a way that will place some of the power inherent in their citizenship back into their hands.

What specifically are we looking for? Just about anything, from governmental corruption to the crooked car repairman and the dishonest merchant down the street. From the pollution of the air and water to the perpetration of human misery in whatever form.

Some folks will call "Osceola" an "underground newspaper," a "hippie magazine," a "scandal sheet" full of yellow journalism.

But "Osceola" will strive to be more than that. We want to serve the community in as many ways as possible . . . by reporting on cultural events, sports, movies, books . . . all in a fashion we hope will be more vital than what the public is currently offered in the only press in town.

So much for the details of our noble cause. Let us tell you about our name.

THE SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION

Osceola
Portrait by George Catlin

Osceola is, first of all, a dead Indian. In fact, it is quite possible that Osceola's performance prior to his death coined the popular paleface expression, "The only good Indian is . . . etc."

In any case, the circumstances surrounding his death form an infamous (but familiar) chapter in the history of the United States genocidal treatment of the American Indian in the 19th century.

As chief of the Florida Seminole tribe, Osceola led one of the earliest fights to prevent relocation of Indian tribes to make way for white settlers. As early as 1827, the U.S. government began making preparations for moving the Everglades-based Seminoles to lovely Arkansas, notable for its lack of just about everything, including Florida's semi-tropical climate and the swampy environment of the Everglades, which the Seminoles had grown used to after several thousand years of living there.

The Army found the Seminoles rather difficult to find in the marsh, sawgrass and bog, much less organize for the long trek to the Ozarks. Between 1835 and 1838, during the Second Seminole War (it is unclear what happened to the First, but prior to Korea, the Second was the only war in which the United States failed to sign a treaty declaring itself victor), Osceola was responsible for what has been called "the most complete defeat of U.S. arms in history," destroying a force of U.S. soldiers, killing 112 of the 115 men in the regiment with virtually no loss to his tribesmen. The event has subsequently become known as Dade's "Massacre," as such battles were generally called when the Indians won.

For five years, between 1832 and 1837, Osceola led his braves on successful raids against the white forces who were attempting to round-up the Florida tribes for shipment to the western reservations. During that time he outwitted some of the finest generals the Army could send to stop him. Were it not for a breach of trust on the part of the U.S. Government, it is conceivable that Osceola could have successfully held off the emigration attempts for many more years . . . a newspaper account of his life describes the fate that befell him:

"Finally, in 1837, some of the Seminoles agreed to a cessation of hostilities and a migration to Arkansas. They left hostages at Fort Dade to bind the agreement, but Osceola, with 200 warriors, raided the fort and released the prisoners. He fought on until September when, after several of his chiefs had been captured, he and 80 of his warriors hoisted a flag of truce for a parley.

"Then followed one of the blackest moments in Army history. As Osceola and his warriors came in under the white flags, they were set upon and seized as captives by troops under the command of General Thomas Sidney Jessup.

"Betrayed and bewildered, Osceola was brought to Fort Moultrie and thrown into prison. He died there (at age 34) four months later, filled with bitterness for the white man."

Osceola's great hatred for the white man at the time of his death is understandable . . . if ironic. For Osceola was actually a white man himself, depending on your definition of what it means to be "white." Genealogical records indicate that his father was a Englishman named William Powell, a trader in the Seminole nation. His mother was the daughter of a run-away slave from South Carolina who married a Creek Indian chief from Georgia.

On January 16, 1960, the Charleston News and Courier put it this way: "At the time of his capture, Osceola was regarded as a murderous halfbreed. He was neither a chief, nor a Seminole, nor a native of Florida. He was defying the U.S. government in its efforts to resettle Indians so that orderly development of Florida could proceed as a residence for white people."

Uppitty injun.

We are justly proud that our new publication bears the name of this noble half-breed, for whom even the U.S. Army showed respect when they erected a tombstone bearing the inscription: "Osceola, Patriot and Warrior." His courageous stand against a government who demanded that his adopted people give up their land for the "orderly development of Florida" typifies the spirit in which this magazine was founded.

But that's only part of Osceola's story, and only part of the reason we chose his name.

Osceola died of tonsillitis. After his death, his physician, a Dr. Weedon, secretly severed Osceola's head from his body and stored it in a bottle of formaldehyde.

The late Eugene Sloan, in his book "Scenic South Carolina," describes the strange history of the macabre relic in this manner:

"Later, it is recorded, Dr. Weedon tried to exhibit it at Peale's Museum on Broadway in New York.

But the New Yorkers were incensed at such a desecration of the dead chief. A mob collected and threatened to burn the museum to the ground if the head was not removed.

"The head, accordingly, was removed and taken to Florida by Dr. Weedon, where for a time it was exhibited in his drug store.

"From here the fate of Osceola's head trails off into obscurity. An article in the Florida Historical Magazine of some years back, avers that the head served some unusual purposes for Dr. Weedon.

"In a masterpiece of understatement, this article describes Dr. Weedon as a man 'whose methods of child care would not find favor today,' for when his children misbehaved and were sent to their room for punishment, the head of Osceola was hung around the bedstead to keep them company.

"The article, written by a distant relative of Dr. Weedon, suggest that Osceola's head eventually was sent "as a gift" to a friend in the North for his medical collection. According to the article, the head was lost when the collection was destroyed by fire."

In the late fifties, a Chamber of Commerce group in Florida decided Osceola's bones would make a nifty tourist trap and attempted to barter with South Carolina, offering at one point a couple of Confederate shells and a 10-inch mortar in trade.

South Carolina, though it took little interest in preserving the gravesite as a historical monument, refused to make a deal, and presumably Osceola's headless remains lie somewhere beneath the Ft. Moultrie sands (though rumors of a midnight raid by Florida Jaycees persist).

It is with the inspiration Osceola provides us then, that we make this first attempt at what we hope is courageous populism, but what we are confident is an appreciation of the absurd trip life (and death) really is.

And for what it's worth, one final note: The word "Osceola" is actually a perversion of the English-Crow-Negro-Non-Seminole Seminole chieftain's name, apparently spelled in it's current fashion because it slides more easily off the white man's forked tongue.

Our chief's actual Indian name was . . . well, you just don't name a magazine "Asseholer," do you?

. . . some of my best friends . . .

by Jim Walser

Thurmond

Culbertson

Zeigler

Governor John C. West—"His Excellency," as one prominent state bureaucrat, presumably quite seriously, called him recently in "The State"—squatted in his plush swivel chair in the State House one day last November and talked politics with a group of youthful visitors.

"Who," one fuzzy-headed Citadel cadet wanted to know, "could the South Carolina Democratic Party nominate to oppose—and defeat—Strom Thurmond in 1972?"

West liked the question, smiled, leaned back in his chair, and replied assuredly, like a good chief of state should. "Oh, we have several candidates who could give Senator Thurmond a good race. I'd say Senator Thurmond is going to be in a lot of trouble next fall if the war doesn't end and the Republican economy stays bad. He's tied to Nixon, and it's gonna hurt him."

Well, election time is upon us, the Great Democratic Process is once again ready to vent itself, to vindicate the good, to toss out the bad. Meanwhile, the war is still very much on, the economy is far from perfect, the Nixon administration suffers from busing woes, the scandalous ITT affair, the Kleindienst nomination, problems in San Diego.

Yet rising above it all is Thurmond, adroitly defying West's astute political analysis. He seems stronger in South Carolina than ever before, aided by a significantly troubled Democratic machine so harassed that it can't even convince one of its chief protagonists to oppose him.

This election for the U.S. Senate appears quite similar at this stage to Thurmond's 1966 election. In that race, Thurmond's first ever for the Senate as a Republican after his party switch in 1964, Thurmond demolished unspectacular Democratic state legislator P. Bradley Morrah of Greenville. Thurmond's popularity swelled during the height of anti-Lyndon Johnsonism in the state about "66.

This year's Democratic sacraficial lamb is Florence state senator Eugene Zeigler, who has been called "an obscure lowstate legislator," by one of the state's major newspapers and whose chief claim to fame may be that he attended Harvard. Not many South Carolina boys have done that.

Zeigler's record in the legislature is so undistinguished and his ideological posture is so close to that of Thurmond that he may lose to Greenville attorney John Bolt Culbertson, even with the support of the Democratic Party hierarchy.

A Culbertson-Thurmond race would be interesting at least, since voters would have a chance to choose between candidates of significantly different beliefs.

Of course, Thurmond will be heavily favored against either opponent. Just in case, though, Thurmond is diligently preparing for the occasion.

"... 'All the laws of Washington, and all the bayonets of the Army cannot force Negroes into their homes'..."

The year was 1948. Hubert Humphrey was a liberal. World War II was over. Korea was heating up. This is where our story begins. Because back in 1948, ol' Strom Thurmond had a dream. Yep, he had a dream for all the black people of America, for the blacks in the North, for the blacks in the South, and all the blacks in South Carolina.

"All the laws of Washington, and all the bayonets of the Army cannot force Negroes into their homes," Strom declared. Likewise, the colored had better watch their collective black step in "their (white) schools, their churches, and their places of recreation and amusement."

Thurmond was speaking at the time to a group of later day Ku Klux Klaners, who nobly called the conference one for "all true white Jeffersonian Democrats." Thurmond was later nominated for president by that group on the Dixiecrat ticket, and carried several Southern states on his "white makes right" platform and campaign. Most of these "Jeffersonian Democrats" had bolted the 1948 Democratic Convention when Humphrey's liberal civil rights plank was adopted by the convention in its platform.

Throughout the '50's and '60's, Thurmond actively opposed all civil rights legislation in South Carolina and in Washington. It was morally and socially unacceptable, he said. Southerners wouldn't stand for it, he said. It was unconstitutional, he said.

That is far in the past for Thurmond now. Early last year, Thurmond and his staff undertook an ever so subtle project to create a new image, a "New Thurmond" as it were. He began making moderate statements on the race issue. He hired a black, Thomas Moss of Orangeburg, to work in his Washington office as a liaison with blacks in South Carolina. Many black leaders in the state have been impressed by Moss and his apparent efficacy in Washington and with Thurmond.

In addition, Thurmond began visiting black constituents and predominantly black poverty areas in South Carolina, and then using his much-heralded influence with the Nixon administration to gain credit for funds earmarked for that area. In some cases, one state newspaper reporter found, Thurmond gained brownie points with his constituents by arriving just in time to present a grant which had passed despite his negative vote in the Senate.

"The State," editorializing on such incidents, commented: "At first glance, this would seem to leave the good senator with a spot of egg on his face. But this is not necessarily the case. What the senator is doing is just plain old textbook politics. If there are elements of inconsistency and hypocrisy, chalk it up to the way the game is played."

Despite the overt stupidity of this line of un-reasoning, many black leaders have accepted Thurmond's actions, or are at least playing along because for now Thurmond seems to be "delivering the goods," as one puts it.

There are several reasons why Thurmond feels compelled to seek black votes in this election, when he has not sought them in the past. One reason is that Thurmond, now 70 years old, wishes to be remembered as a "statesman," a champion of all the people, and he is taking no chances on leaving a tarnished recial image, as the late Jimmy Byrnes did.

There are more practical reasons as well. Despite the Party's growth, Republican votes in South Carolina are still lacking. Even with the assistance of Thurmond and Vice President Agnew, Albert Watson lost the governor's race in 1970. Nixon, running with strong support from Thurmond still could manage only 38 per cent of the South Carolina vote in 1968. Thus Thurmond feels he must solidify his coalition of Republicans and so-called "Thurmond Democrats" with as many black votes as he can muster.

Thurmond gives the impression of taking the election far more seriously than pollsters and political experts feel he needs to, as evidenced by his quiet refusal to campaign for local GOP candidates. State Republican chairman Ken Powell and other officials had expected help from Thurmond in the local races. Says one Republican, "Marshall Parker could have beaten Hollings in 1968 if Thurmond had helped him, but he didn't and Parker lost."

Thurmond's intra-party problems are not likely to figure prominently in November's race, however. His ties with the Nixon administration, the blacks who simply reject him and his new image, and the everpresent Democratic machine will be much more costly.

Next: The Democrats

A MAGAZINE FOR COLUMBIA & SOUTH CAROLINA
osceola

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